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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable RAPHAEL G. WARNOCK, a Senator from the State of Georgia.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, source of all wisdom, as Senators strive to make critical decisions, guide their hearts and minds. Give them such courage of conviction that they will ignore the siren calls to deviate from integrity. Help them to walk along ethical paths even when they are misunderstood by insiders and outsiders. Lord, deliver them from those who question their motives and misrepresent their intentions. Remind them that You are the one constituent who ultimately matters and that pleasing You must be their first priority. May they trust You to open doors that no one can shut and to shut doors that no one can open.

We pray in Your sovereign Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mrs. MURRAY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 7, 2023.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable RAPHAEL G. WARNOCK, a Senator from the State of Georgia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WARNOCK thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Robert Stewart Ballou, of Virginia, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Virginia.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

FOX NEWS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, last night, millions of Americans tuned into one of the most shameful hours we have ever seen on cable television. With contempt for the facts, disregard of the risks, and knowing full well he was lying—lying—to his audience, FOX News host Tucker Carlson ran a lengthy segment last night arguing the January 6 Capitol attack was not a violent insurrection.

By diving deep into the waters of conspiracy and cherry-picking from thousands of hours of security footage, Mr. Carlson told the bald-faced lie that the Capitol attack—which we all saw with our own eyes—was somehow not an attack at all. He tried to argue it was nothing more than a peaceful sightseeing tour—can you imagine—a nonviolent demonstration, a perfectly fine and appropriate instance of people expressing their opinion.

I and so many others who were here in the Capitol and millions and millions of Americans are just furious with Tucker Carlson and KEVIN MCCARTHY today.

Many of my staff were here at the Capitol on January 6. Their lives were put in danger, as were the lives of many of my colleagues, as well as police, maintenance staff, reporters, countless others.

At one point, I was within 30 feet of the rioters. One of them, I was told, shouted out “let’s get him” before my detail pulled me away and we ran in the other direction.

To say January 6 was not violent is a lie—a lie, pure and simple. I don’t think I have ever seen a prime time cable news anchor manipulate his viewers the way Mr. Carlson did last night. I don’t think I have ever seen an anchor treat the American people and American democracy with such disdain.

And he is going to come back tonight with another segment. FOX News should tell him not to.

FOX News, Rupert Murdoch, tell Carlson not to run a second segment of lies. You know it is a lie. He has admitted it is a lie.

And Speaker MCCARTHY is every bit as culpable as Mr. Carlson. Speaker MCCARTHY’s decision to share security footage with FOX looked like a mistake from the very beginning. But after last night, it looks like a disaster. Speaker MCCARTHY has played a treacherous game by catering to the

● This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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hard right. He has enabled the Big Lie and has further eroded away at our precious democracy. When people don't believe elections are on the level, that is the beginning of the end of this bold experiment in democracy that has gone on for more than 200 years.

It is all the more shameful because Speaker MCCARTHY knows precisely what kind of customer Mr. Carlson is. He is not surprised by this outcome. What a low point for Speaker MCCARTHY. What a low point for FOX News.

As reporting on the Dominion lawsuit shows, Mr. Carlson had no problem admitting behind the scenes that the Big Lie is pure garbage. When Sydney Powell went on the air to push the stolen election narrative, Mr. Carlson told fellow anchor Laura Ingraham that "Sydney Powell is lying"—his words by the deposition. Mr. Carlson's own producer texted him that "I don't think there is evidence of voter fraud that swung the election."

They know. They know full well they have been lying, and they are doing it anyway. We all, Americans of all types and stripes and corners of this country—Democrats, Republicans, Independents—need to take a stand and call out Mr. Carlson's conduct for what it is: a dangerous, unforgivable attempt to destabilize our democracy and rewrite the history of the worst attack on our Constitution since the Civil War.

It is an insult to every police officer who was on the scene that terrible, fearful day. It is an insult to the memory of every single person who perished in connection with the attack, especially to the memory of Brian Sicknick.

Nonviolent? Ask the Sicknick family. It makes me sick just thinking about what his family must be going through this morning.

And it is an insult to everyone who cares about our democracy and wishes to preserve the dream of our Founders in our day, in our age. I hope every Member of this Chamber will call out FOX and Mr. Carlson for defending the insurrectionists.

And, again, I am disappointed and angered in Speaker MCCARTHY's decision to share sensitive security footage with Mr. Carlson. Speaker MCCARTHY was here that day. He knows what actually happened. His staff and members suffered like everyone else, but he chose cheap political expediency over truth and preservation of democracy.

I condemn Mr. Carlson for siding with the enemies of democracy. I strongly condemn Speaker MCCARTHY's actions and fiercely oppose his decision to share this footage with Carlson. I urge FOX News to order Carlson to cease propagating the Big Lie on his network and to level with their viewers about the truth—the truth—behind the efforts to mislead the public. Conduct like theirs is just asking for another January 6 to happen.

RAIL SAFETY

Mr. President, on another subject, as East Palestine continues grappling

with the aftermath of last month's derailment and after a second derailment in Ohio last weekend, Norfolk Southern announced yesterday a new six-point plan they claim will "immediately enhance the safety of its operations."

But here is the question all of us should be asking: Why weren't these protocols already in place?

When Norfolk Southern CEO Alan Shaw comes before the Senate on Thursday, this is just one of the important questions he must answer. Here are a few others: What steps is Norfolk Southern taking to prevent future disasters like the one in East Palestine? Why did Norfolk Southern spend years lobbying against safety regulations intended to prevent accidents like the one last month? How will Norfolk Southern ensure communities along train routes with hazardous materials get the resources they need to respond to accidents—the resources and the information they need? Why did Norfolk Southern launch a \$10 billion stock buyback program last year when that money could have gone to upgrading safety equipment, hiring more workers, or paying their workers better wages?

We need answers to these questions. We need an honest, candid discussion how we can prevent accidents like this in the future. Part of that discussion must acknowledge the plain truth: Republicans have spent years listening to the rail lobby and opposing safety rules in the name of boosting rail company profits. I am talking about the Trump administration loosening brake maintenance and inspection regulations, attempting to deregulate freight train crew size, and nullifying a rule that implemented safety programs. I am talking about Republicans in this Chamber pushing for the "self-regulation" of railroads and leaving safety up to the whims of the free market, to allow for the transportation of more hazardous materials without proper oversight, and to encourage the automation of track inspection at the expense of safety. All of these create dangers.

We don't know yet all the details of what exactly happened in East Palestine, but we know these deregulatory actions make things less safe.

I hope that we can work together, Democrats and Republicans, to put a much-needed, long-overdue check on big rail and make sure another East Palestine never happens. And I commend the bipartisan legislation led by the Senators from Ohio—Senator BROWN, a Democrat and Senator VANCE, a Republican—to move things forward.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. President, the budget. For the last 2 months, Democrats have highlighted the contrast between our vision and the Republican vision for our country. Republicans, meanwhile, have spent all this time trying to prove us right.

In a few days, President Biden will release his budget for the 2024 fiscal

year. Americans can expect the President to present a bold, optimistic, and responsible path for the Nation. The President's plan is going to show how we can lower the deficit in a responsible manner. His plan will strengthen Social Security and keep Medicare solvent for another 2 decades. And the President's plan will preserve his promise not to raise taxes on anyone making less than \$400,000 a year.

This isn't just talk because Democrats have already shown we can do these things. We already lowered the deficit by hundreds of billions of dollars. We already lowered the cost of prescription drugs, like insulin, and we hope to build on that promise in the near future. And the President explained this morning in an op-ed in the New York Times that he plans to build on the progress we made last year in the Inflation Reduction Act by making Medicare solvent through the year 2050. Isn't that great news for the American people, even younger people who will need it before 2050?

He will expand the list of drugs Medicare can renegotiate. He will take profits that used to go to Big Pharma and put it toward deficit reduction. Many Americans think it would be just a great idea to take the money that normally goes to Big Pharma and put it towards deficit reduction and towards keeping Medicare solvent longer. This commonsense step will help millions of ordinary Americans.

Republicans, to their credit, are being very helpful about erasing any doubt about which party is fighting for the working people and the middle class. While Democrats are for keeping taxes low for most Americans, Republicans tried to push a national sales tax that would have sent taxes surging by 30 percent for millions. While Democrats want to make the wealthy pay their fair share, House Republicans passed their first bill, a proposal to carve out the IRS and make it easier for wealthy tax cheats to avoid detection.

While Democrats will protect Social Security, Republicans, like the senior Senator from Wisconsin, decided to go on the radio the day after the State of the Union and call Social Security a "Ponzi scheme." Can you imagine?

If my Republican colleagues have a problem with what I am saying, there is an easy solution. Speaker MCCARTHY needs to stop dodging and show us the Republican plan. It is now March 7. Two months have passed already in this year. The debt ceiling X date is approaching. Republicans have said they will release a plan. They say they want spending cuts in return for just paying our debts which we already incurred. Where is their plan? What is the hold-up?

The President will release his budget very soon, and the onus is on Speaker MCCARTHY to respond with a serious plan of his own that is a budget plan